

SURVIVAL!

C H A M P I O N S
Wycombe Wanderers survived a fierce second half battering from Rothmans Isthmian League leaders Enfield on Saturday to come away from Southbury Road with a vital point from this top of the table battle.

Matches of this importance seldom produce the good football of which both sides are capable. I suppose there is too much at stake. Saturday's game was no exception although the match was fiercely competitive throughout the 90 minutes.

Wanderers more than held their own in the first half but after the break they came in for some of their heaviest pressure this season. That they held out is a tribute to their excellent defence in which centre half John Delaney and Paul Birdseye were outstanding. Delaney revels in the big game atmosphere and his complete mastery of Keith Searle, the former Wycombe favourite, was one of the key points in

Wycombe withstand Enfield onslaught

Enfield 0, Wycombe Wanderers 0

the game. Birdseye was probably the coolest competitor on show and seemed to have far more time than anyone else.

Solid support came from the ever reliable Keith Mead while David Bullock, Terry Reardon and Geoff Anthony all made notable contributions.

Yes, the Blues came in for some terrible pressure in a second half that was one-way traffic towards the visitors' net. Enfield forced 10 corners in this half and 14 in all. The Blues had four — three of them being unforgivably wasted by three different players who all sent the ball behind the goal-line.

Enfield will probably feel

somewhat aggrieved that they didn't take maximum points but the truth is they rarely got in a clean strike at goal. Most of their pressure was territorial and countless moves broke down when approaching the penalty area. Goalkeeper John Maskell, in fact, was never seriously stretched apart from a couple of occasions. It must also be stated that Enfield were desperately unlucky when Derek Baker crashed a shot against the underside of the bar towards the close.

At the other end, Enfield 'keeper Mick Lowe was the quietest man on the field. Wanderers were unable to test him at all during the

game and once again, the build-ups were promising but the finishing poor. The closest they came was a Dave Bullock drive from some 25 yards which thundered a foot wide of an upright.

But Wanderers at least have some excuse for their inability to find the net — they were without leading goalscorer Tony Horseman, ruled out of the match with 'flu. Mick Holifield moved into the front three while Ray Eaton came into midfield. The back four stayed the same although Birdseye wore the number 11 shirt, probably a move to counter Enfield's pre-match tactics

once the teams had been announced.

The Blues began well and won their first corner after eight minutes which Eaton sent behind the line. But it was Ray who got in Wycombe's first effort, a volley that lacked sufficient power to trouble Lowe.

Thanks to Reardon and company in midfield, Wanderers had a plentiful supply of ball and Anthony began to trouble Phil Fry on the right flank. Once pushing the ball through Fry's legs, Geoff got in some nice early crosses. Meanwhile, Enfield were frequently trapped off-side by Wycombe's back four which moved swiftly forward out of defence.

his defenders, who did the job superbly.

There were some close calls, though. Dave Lawrence wriggled through the penalty area and drove a shot just over the top and a 40 yard run by player-manager Fred Callaghan ended with Maskell coming out well to punch clear. Then Baker sent another effort curling just too high.

Wanderers were pinned in their own half and without Horseman's poise up front, whenever the ball did go upfield, they often lost possession and allowed Enfield to power forward again. Fortunately for the Blues, the league leaders took much too long in building their attacks and showed a marked resentment for shooting. This gave Wycombe's defence plenty of time to re-group.

Dave Alexander replaced the hard working Eaton after 65 minutes and did much to relieve the pressure towards the close. One exciting burst from Holifield, who looked unhappy in the front line, promised a breakthrough but the shot was too early and lacked power.

Lowe saved comfortably and sent the ball down field. The ball was played out to Baker who controlled and then found a yard's space on the edge of the box. Turning well, he sent in a cracking drive on the left foot which flew over Maskell's outstretched hand and thumped against the underside of the crossbar. The ball bounced down and out to Eason, but Maskell recovered quickly and dived bravely to fist the ball out for Delaney to punt clear. With round goalposts, Enfield might have taken the lead but as a fellow pressman said at the time, those square posts at Southbury Road have saved Enfield on a few occasions in the past, too.

The home side forced three more corners in the last 10 minutes but once again, sterling work by Delaney, Mead and Birdseye cleared the danger for Wycombe.

The draw on Saturday will give Wanderers a considerable psychological advantage for the rest of the season, for they have now taken four out of a possible six points from the league leaders. It is bound to be neck and neck for the remainder of the term and the point taken on Saturday may yet prove to have a major bearing on the title.

ENFIELD: M. Lowe; A. Jennings, F. Callaghan, B. Wilson, P. Fry; J. Tone, M. O'Sullivan, D. Lawrence; L. Eason, K. Searle, D. Baker, Sub D. Gill (not used).

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, J. Delaney, D. Bullock; H. Kennedy, T. Reardon, R. Eaton (sub D. Alexander 65 mins); M. Holifield, D. Evans, G. Anthony.

Referee: C. Downey (Isleworth).

Official attendance: 1,450.